

modern medical practice might reasonably be considered to be in the failure of the physician to provide information to those who are concerned as it develops.

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### Withholding of Physicians' Services

TO THE EDITOR: I enjoyed your editorial essay "On the Withholding of Physicians' Services" [West J Med 123:136-138, Aug 1975] far more than mere words can express to you. There are many of us who are appalled at the callousness of doctors who went on strike. Any good that we were accomplishing in terms of public image and legislative goals was by that action badly compromised, if not negated.

Even the most conservative of us must admit that the tripling or quadrupling of premiums had created a crisis. The real point of the problem was why had this not been anticipated by our leaders? I know that you, among others, have been aware for a long time of the precarious fiscal position of our professional liability carriers in regards to this segment of their business operation. It seems to me that for at least four to five years organized medicine has been stalling and not really addressing itself to the basic issues of the rising incidence of claims and their source in the attitude of the public, not the increased incidence of physician error.

This was actually more of a social than an insurance or medical care problem, as we all know.

Thank goodness there will be some tort remedies and I am happy to join with you in the approach that you have taken.

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### "Gurney" Again— Scots Origin Theory Scotched?

TO THE EDITOR: The suggestion of Dr. J. B. deC. M. Saunders (West J Med 122:515-516, Jun 1975) that the word "gurney" derives from the Scots verb "girn" (meaning to groan in pain, to complain persistently, etc.) appealed very much to my sentimental Celtic (Welsh) nature. However, his assertion that "the word gurney for a

wheeled stretcher is common in Scotland and the North of England" was harder for me to swallow because I once worked in a hospital in the North of England and never once heard the word.

Therefore, I recently appealed to the faculties of Scottish university medical schools for information and I have now received replies from Aberdeen,<sup>1</sup> Dundee,<sup>2</sup> Edinburgh<sup>3</sup> and Glasgow.<sup>4</sup> The answers reveal that although "girn" does mean to complain persistently, "gurney" is unknown in Scotland. It is certainly not used to describe a wheeled stretcher; in Scotland, as in England, such a conveyance is known as a trolley.

It seems to me that the best present theory is still that "gurney" was somehow derived from the gurney cab or bus.<sup>5,6</sup>

Further support of this idea is contained in a 1966 article recently brought to my attention by its author, P. Tamony.<sup>7</sup> Apparently, a gurney was a horse-drawn rear-entrance cab with two seats set longitudinally, facing each other. It was named after its inventor, J. Theodore Gurney of Boston who was granted a United States patent for it in 1883.

At the end of the 19th century Gurney Cab companies existed in both San Francisco and Oakland. One can probably assume that they were so named after the type of cab which they used (at any rate, the proprietors of the Oakland company were named Kane and Daly). A Gurney Cab Company operated in Vancouver as well and there too, it seems, the word came to be applied to the wheeled stretcher.<sup>8</sup>

According to Tamony, San Francisco police wagons and ambulances came to be known as gurneys, presumably because they also had rear entrances. So perhaps it was only a small jump to apply the word to any wheeled vehicle designed to carry a sick or injured person.

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